

BIN-THA-BART-RUA WITH RELATED ISSUES : A BRIEF STUDY AT KWAE ORM RIVERINE

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Introduction

This following paper expresses of change, persistent and revitalization from some cultural rituals. These locate on the in between site of ambiguous rural-urban fringe: the western part of Bangkok suburban “Nonthaburi”- one of the three pilot projects of Thailand cultural environment programs. As well as socio-anthropology study “Field of Cultural Capitol”, 2002 was significant based research and literature reviews of this issue made by Marc Askew.

This paper will represent from 3 points of view, first focused on cultural fringe between two local temples “Wat-pra-ngean”-“Wat-hua-khu”. Second was viewed from the eyes of a 78 year old local lady, who’s expressed a local history from 3 generation, from agriculture till tourism. Third view came from some indigenous architecture, rituals, cultural landscape from author exploration. All the paper presented in 9 short episodes weaving from an old buddism lyric-*Puttarnai* [Buddism future forecast book] - including conclusion and suggestion.

Methodology

This study was a qualitative approach, with vernacular architectural exploration and unstructured interviews, edited, coded in through the dimension of space and time.

Text

1 Mae Choi and Yai Khew [Mother Choi and Grandma Khew] (Fig 1)

“I was born here, and I lives here “Clong- bang-muang”[Bangmuang canal] and I don’t want to go anywhere....”(Mae Choi)

She introduced herself like this “(when I was born)...My father went to go the office of the district named me ‘Choi’ relate to his name, but grandma called me “Ruae”. She told about Yai Kiew, old baby sitter, who helped her feeding second child that “*She (Yai Kiew) cannot read, but she love*

books. She’d got a big wooden box inside filled with books. One was Puttarnai she loves to listen my reading that book. I remember some part of it-pan din pen rew pla [the land will become fish meat pattern], tong fah pen yai mangmum [the sky will look like spider webs], me tang tae mai me khon dern [the ways will walk with no one], ban muan pen klong mai keed [the houses will look like match boxes], krobkrow ja yak kan [the families will be parts]”. “And you will see them all by yourself. Yai Kiew said to me”.

Mae Choi was agriculture - farmer and gardener- like all the population of Nonthaburi in that time. She started her lifetime with prosperity from the consequence of Mahasawasdi canal project. As a pheasant she remember the long rice’s trunk that received from government in time of great flooding 1942 and called that event “*Namlanglok*”[Water that clean the world], and “*Namlangluaedyipoon*” [Water that clean Japanese blood]. After that time she became a rich farmer and leased her land for other farmer stopped her farmer career just only gardener in 1967.

In 1986 land use of Nonthaburi opened for Banjadsan [housing estates] for the first time with a lots of change. Nowadays she lives with her granddaughters, grandsons sometime she merits at the temples nearby with her the guests may come along.

2 Talad Kwan [the name of old Nonthaburi] (Fig 2)

We can separate and understand Nonthaburi in 2 part east and west, the first is newly for settlement since 1900. But the western part are about 400 years older than the first, since 1449 in La Loubere’s archive, named “Talad Kwan”-an fruits orchards area . This part are riverside of old Chaophraya river -Kwae Orm riverine ,the river of Chaophraya in this part today was a shortcut canal made by King Chairachaitirat(1534-1546). A lots of old temples are eye-witnesses for this essential.(Askew:197) In term of Thai architecture ,some of those temples were citation such as Ubosot Wat Prasart in King Prasarttong reign , the entablature of Ubosot Wat Chompuwak were citation in King Narai the great period with its “Vilanda” type (Nor N Pak Nam:45), the bell tower of Wat Lamutnai, the wooden bell tower of Wat Singh, bibliotique and Sala of the same

temple.(Somkid:125,123,142,180) , Wat Amphawan,Wat Lamut,Wat Bangkanoon (Saran1994:184-202). About Wat Bangkanoon , Mae Choi told that the recent name was Wat Bangkanoonkungong, and there are special ritual for use of banana's leave ware in ceremony.(Askew:220)

Thai orchards in alluvium flood plain in central part of Thailand are an appropriate technology for changing rice farm to trees farm .Its also appropriate with the skillful and population and ecology of Siam in early of Ratanakosin era until now.

3 The canals and the bridges (Fig 3)

“Bin tha bath in water way are common here”(Maha Udon: interview)

The skill of Thai- China gardener who digs ditch and dike made tree-orchards possible in alluvium flood plain area. The canals, not only for irrigation but for also transportation, become core of Thai culture and life-style. The following sentences explained how they made it and lived with.

“The shortcut canal in the reign of King Chairaja should not made by digging in plain land, but it might have a little canal made by local people and then just expended”(Prince Naris in Sudjit(2002) ,correspond with Maha Udon 37 years old chief abbot of wat huakhu. He said

“...Corroborated together, they dig a lot of network of little canals , they are important for agriculture, transportation and also Binthabartnam[monks receive foods in water way] .There are a lot here, wat amplwan,wat bangkanoon,wat praek, wat somkliang,wat singh,wat maipadungket,wat sriruangbun,wat srisawasd...”(Maha Udon: interview)

To expand the canal they use many ways man laboring, animal laboring, and nature helping such as

“... hiring for Chinese labors digged in through Ban Pohak one line, and then hired local buffaloes to walking on, after that the tidal made flow muddy water away , not shallow anymore till now...” (Tipakornwong in Sudjit: 95)

For the quality of water nowadays *“I had blamed Pasijaraen canal for their black smelt water, but it does happen now beside my house.* (Mae Choi: interview)

The local bridge of Wat Somkliang is a eye witness of indigenous intelligent in cultural landscape in this area. This wooden bridge with wooden Thai style roof is beautiful in proportion and human scale, one of a nice architecture.

4 Luangpu kram and Hor Tri[scripture's hall] of Wat pra-ngaen (Fig 4)

“Kun Ta [means “Suk” her husband] was student of Luangpu Kram Wat pra-ngaen”(Mae Choi)

Mae Choi told me about the beautiful bridge same as Wat Somkliang in Wat Pra-ngaen , the people called it “Sapan Luangpu Kram”[bridge of grandpa abbot Kram] .Wat Pra-ngaen established since1821, by Pra Ajarn Suea in the reign of King Rama I, there are a beautiful Hortri here too. Both designed and constructed by Luangpu Kram were eye-witnesses of prosperity of pheasant society after the project of Mahasawasdi Grand Canal (1877-1907) (Askew: 198)

“In my time farmers can be rich even they took only one corpse per year” (Mae Choi)

“...her husband had been a monk; he was the last student of Lungpu Kram. He had been row the boat receive foods (Binthabartruae) and saw my grandma working in the field. After he finished monk status, in funeral ceremony of grandma's mother, he said “I'll take care of this orphan lady”.(Prapaipak, Mae Choi's grand daughter: interview)

After the marriage grandpa Suk became chief of village of Huakhunok [mu 8], still been there for 10 year.

About Luangpu Kram not only fully respect from the people till today, but he also was a great wooden craftman in his time. His scripture's hall has got the fine arts department's citation.

5 Sala- gan- pa-rien [Public multipurpose building in temple]

“ If I 'got real woods,I do never abandon of bamboos” (Maha Udon)

There was an paradox case about 2 Sala gan pa rien in Choi's memory .Of Wat Phra-ngen the former temple, which grandpa Suk had been a monk, and Wat Huakhu in term of relationship between community and their temple, it was reason why Mae Choi 's family did not go to Wat Phra-ngen for merit kinds anymore.

First, there were wooden big sala-gan-pa-riens in both Wat Phra-ngen and Wat Huakhu, funded, managed, built by local predecessors. But in Wat Phra-ngen the later prime monk decided to destruct it, substituted with new reinforce concrete one .He did not ask anybody and his motivate was “Watpatanatuayang”[precedent development temple award] discourse . In the opposite way Wat Huakhu decided to listen to the people said, *“You can destruct the old wooden*

sala, but after our generation pass away, our memory about predecessor are inside the building.”

So he said like that *“If I ‘got real woods, I do never abandon of bamboos”*, it mean Wat Huakhu will always conserve the sala in good condition.

The story about, how they built the old sala was quite interesting. In Mae Choi’s memory, Tid Chui, her farther, told her that *“In that time, we needed volunteer quest for fine teak wood logs, and its became my friends 2 brothers Tui and Seng Tiasud. They leaved us for a long long time.”* After they come back one of them told Tid Chui that *“...people think that I leave and have another wife and family”* *“They walked, slept on the way to Northern, they braved to, because they had been travel with herds buying and selling. They told their wife just 2 months journey. But they leaved for 3 years for teak log rafts, you can look its by yourself nowadays, it still strength like same tree. The group of raft flowed along network of riverines current in rainy season, very difficulty, a lot of merit.* (Mae Choi) (Fig 5)

This case are classic for item “sense of belonging”, belong each other between architecture and man, or places and community. I heard this some from Saint-Exupery “Little Prince”.

6 Binthabartrua

“I started contribute for monk foods since the age of adolescent, my mother contributed everyday, she had said absent for a while, but worrying made he come back to contribute.”(Mae Choi)

Binthabartrua[receive the contributed foods] are common diary duty for ordinary monks for 2500 years. In riverine culture community “Binthabartruae” [receive the contributed foods by boat] harmonic with lifestyles. As Nonthaburi the network of riverines become basic relationships for community and monastery.

Example for Wat Huakhu, this place along with 4 direction canals, 3 direction are short distant to community so a monk rows a little boat each direction. Western direction along Klong bangna is long distant, so they use a bigger boat with 2 monks rowing.

They put ordinary foods in tiffin carriers on the front of the boat, and put sweet foods at the rare of the boat. There are 22 lives in Wat Huakhu, bigger part of the foods for them come from “Binthabartruae”.

This activity becomes a cultural engine for water quality

control too, when the monks found that the stream was dirty. They can ask for the people keep it clean; do not throw away any pieces of garbage. This cultural activity also found in Samutsongkram province also, both provinces were pilot prototyped for Thailand Cultural Environment Project, Natural and Cultural Environmental Conservation Division, The Office of Natural Resources and Environment Policy and Planning, Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment.(Fig 6.7)

7 Thaihouse

“...take falang [foreigner] with us, make them know and feel about our culture” (Mae Choi)

In the transition of ambiguous rural-urban fringe, (Askew: 194) “Thaihouse” was an interest local change in this area. It belongs to Mrs.Prasan, Mae Choi’s elder daughter. After marriage with Mr. Paiboon a “cultural adventure” traveling agency, they establish a group of tradition Thai house as Thai style home-stay with Thai cuisine courses since 1990. Sadly, Mr. Paiboon passed away so soon, with other obstructive factors, “Black May 1992” a political crisis that brought no one to Thailand, and financial crisis from load banking. Mae Choi sold her land and gave the money her daughter to clear debt.

Nowadays Thaihouse prided to welcome many honorable people as members of European dynasty and so on. Thaihouse also citation as a place for 3 items- homestay (Yousry-Jouve. 2003, Scholz. 2004) - traditional Thai architecture (Chami, Phuthorn and Mckeen. 2002.) and thai cuisine training courses. (Knaur.2005)

Some guests met Mae Choi, *“when we go to monastery for kind of merits, if they (guests) want to join us, we happy to bring them too, make them know about our traditions, and merits together.”* (Mae Choi) .Thaihouse become transition a place for east meet west in globalization.

If indigenous culture and knowledge can establish in any locality, the productivity are gainful and sustainability of those place will guarantied.(Fig 8)

8 Pan din pen rew pla [the land will become fish meat pattern]

This part will critique on the way of housing estates happened in cultural site. For Nonthaburi the first housing estates boomed in 1986 and downed between *Tom Yam Kung* crises in 1997-2000. Second wave will happen from new civil project such as western outer-ring road, western middle ring road, bring a lot of housing estates.

Problematic between two group of population as I know

“gentrification” (Jaturong: 2003) will happen. Body of knowledge about these phenomena will reduce increasing rate of the cultural environment, within carrying capacity. Note on state control tool ,EIA (Environment Impact Assessment) should be apply to cultural case and understanding existing of indigenous richness dynamic system of living institutes. First EIA should understand urban cultural fabrics, second the priority items for each project could not be the same. Dam doesn’t like housing estates. Third, for “conflict of interest” sake, the owner could not direct hire the EIA consortium.

Suggestion about “binthabartruae” as a cultural engine can harmonize new comers with local richness situation as well as system of network of canals. The housing estates should engage the cultural public space to increase quality of lives, beside defensive with fences.

I also propose a topic “socio-political space” as quality sustainability of any built environment. There is “sense of belonging”, “self-reliance power”, “and local rights” inside the topic. (Saran: 2004)

9 Cultural Reproduction

The problem of environmental failure could not look as fractal separated from the cultural failure; both problems were come from the same causes. In other hand, environmental revitalization must be developed simultaneously with cultural reproduction.

About cultural environmental failure in the cases found 2 types , first come from inside the core of community , the lack of self- esteem,self-reliance, misunderstanding of their own cultural heritage as Askew’s Wat Chalor case (Askew:222-223). The second come from outside the community, state policy and activity like ““Watpatanatuayang”discourse, and from private sector as housing estates which looking for profits and cannot see other good factor.

Cultural environmental engine is the answer. State must revise their direction of thinking and their acting, not monopolize, looking for participation, subsidize local youths for activity of arts &craft restoration, conservation of vernacular architecture, might be strategy for sustainable development.

Further more, cultural engine as “Binthabartrua” can reproduce in other places, which have some similar contexts. Basically, it concludes water-front culture community and “wat”, even in the core part of Bangkok Metropolitans (a lot of trouble here). It could be revitalization of water quality of riverines in Bangkok, starting of sustain transportation,

uniqueness of human settlement.

There are some observations in changing in orchard base community Nonthaburi, in case of “Binthabartrua”, new comer monks cannot row tradition boat, basic skill for the past. But the most important is local architecture as eye witness of intellect dynamic relativity between humankind, the eco-system and civilization. In the other hand misunderstand of this fact can produce a lot of troubles and destroy of self-respective inside everybody, especially from state sector and private sector. Last there were some conclusive from Mae Choi,

“When I read the “Puttamnai” I did not understand it. In this time I found and can see it all clearly now.

Pan-din pen rew pla[the land will become fish meat pattern]

it means trace of housing estates on the land.

Tong fah pen yai mangmum [the sky will look like spider webs],

it is electricity and telephone line.

Me tang tae mai me khon dern [the ways will walk with no one],

it is toll way, and expresses way. They don’t allow people to walk in.

Ban muang pen klong mai keed [the houses will look like match boxes],

it is ordinary western type house.(Modern architecture).

Krobkrow ja yak kan [the families will be parts],

I understand that, you see, in family each learning, each working in different place,and long distants,so they separate”

“In my life, I have seen it all, like Yai Keaw said...”

Abstract

This paper is a part of study in the same topic in subgroup- “Change, Resistance and Revitalize of Culture” in The Resources Management for Peace and Sustain Project, Mahidol University. The methodology of this study was integrated between the architectural field research and qualitative research as genealogy approach. With three focus points in a historicity of an original family as key-informances, a system of relationship with the temples network-Bin Tha Bat Rua- [monk with a barge begging for food by the stream] and the last is empirical issue of architectures in a local place at Bangyai Nonthaburi province-a long last settlement site. The changing and resistance of Bin Tha Bart Rua are several ways from ability of monk to drive as routine ritual to transformation and morphology on the Bangkok rural-urban fringe and urban shadow. But the remains, such as local route man –made canals, and some local architecture relating on religion became phenomenon eye witnesses for their intellectual for cultural changing and resistance. That can apply to social reproductions for environmental treatment for revitalizing of Thai urban and rural livelihoods. This paper also suggests that the most important courses are any misunderstandings of any stakeholders for development discourses subsidized by respective in indigenous wisdoms.

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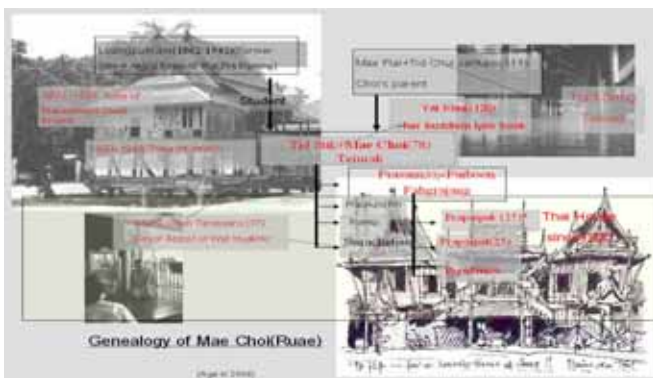


Fig 1. Genealogy of Mae Choi Temrak



Fig 3. The bridge of Wat Somkliang



Fig 2. Site Map (Royal Thai survey department)



Fig 4. Hortri Wat Pra-ngam



Fig 5. Salaganparean Wat Huakhu, Wat Somkling (right)



Fig 6. Binthabartrua



Fig 7. Several types of barge keeping dock for Binthabartrua



Fig 8. Thaihouse